



Town of Warren, Rhode Island

Minutes of the Economic Development Board

The Town of Warren, RI Economic Development Board met at a Regular Meeting on January 23, 2012 at 6:00 p.m. at Town Hall, located at 514 Main Street. The presiding officer was Brandt Heckert. Board members present were Sara Volino, Karen Dionne, Mark Lombari, and Spencer Morris. Board members Darcy DaCosta, Patrick DeSocio, and Kate Dickson were absent. Ex officio member Caroline Wells was absent. Kristin MacDonald was present at the meeting to serve as Secretary to the EDB.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

1. Review and Approval of Minutes from the Regular Meeting of December 12, 2011 and the Special Meeting of December 28, 2011

The minutes from the regular meeting held on December 12, 2011 and the Special Meeting held on December 28, 2011 were reviewed by the members via email. Ms. Volino made a motion to accept the minutes from both meetings, the motion was seconded by Ms. Dionne, and all members were in favor.

2. Update from business outreach workgroup (Volino, Dionne, Heckert)

The business outreach workgroup presented the Board with a sample of a card, designed by Ms. Dionne, to be presented to downtown business owners. The Board discussed at length the mission of the business outreach survey. The initial goal of the project is introductory; EDB members will have the opportunity to introduce themselves personally to downtown business owners. The Board discussed what questions should be posed to business owners, which prompted Mr. Morris to be concerned that the information gathered from the project be useful to business owners. Mr. Lombari felt that the EDB should offer a "clear and consistent message" to business owners, and said that he would like to focus on businesses outside of the downtown area. Mr. Heckert emphasized that the most important point of the survey is outreach and introducing business owners to the EDB. Materials will be presented at the February meeting to begin the business outreach survey. An excel file listing each downtown business will be available in the Dropbox file so that board members can check off businesses as each survey is completed.

3. Discussion and action for study of tax stabilization policy and business retention practices

The Board decided to move forward on this issue by first reviewing the current tax stabilization program and secondly to make recommendations based on what other communities are offering for tax stabilization and business retention. The Board discussed providing an exemption on the tangible tax as an incentive to artists. Mr. Morris agreed to head a workgroup to study this issue; he plans to meet with the Tax Assessor, Cathy Maisano, in order to better understand how and if the current tax stabilization policies are influencing Warren's economic climate. Mr. Lombardi agreed to research the tax policies and business retention programs in both Bristol and Barrington. The workgroup will report back to the Board at the February meeting

4. Discussion and action for review of municipal policies and ordinances pertaining to key commercial properties in town

The discussion focused on the need to streamline the ordinance process for key commercial properties in town. The Board discussed the need for a defined vision for the development of key properties, as well as the need to facilitate the administrative aspects of commercial development. The Board agreed that the best way to go forward on this issue would be to talk to the Town Planner and the Building Official regarding issues with overlay districts, special districts and other zoning issues. Mr. Lombardi said that he would speak with Mr. Nash, and possibly Ms. Wells, regarding these issues before the February meeting.

5. Discussion on improvement to bike path section at Railroad Avenue

Mr. Heckert reported that he will be meeting with the Town Planner to discuss the results of the parking study, as well as the possibility of expanding municipal parking on Cole Avenue. The Board discussed the general lack of aesthetic appeal of the bike path along Railroad Avenue. One suggestion was to contact Arnold Robinson of RWU regarding having his students take part in a study about improving this important gateway area to the downtown shopping district. Improvements to this section of town are difficult because some of the area is state property; the Board agreed to continue working with Caroline Wells on this item.

6. Discussion on use of the "Dropbox" for centralized information sharing

At the previous meeting, each EDB member was sent an invitational link to use "Dropbox" for centralized information sharing. Ms. MacDonald volunteered to be the administrator for the EDB "Dropbox" folder. All present board members have accessed the EDB "Dropbox" account.

A motion was made to adjourn, the motion was seconded, and all members were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristin M. MacDonald

Minutes submitted by Kristin MacDonald
February 23, 2012

